



COMDTPUB 16700.4
NVIC 04-08
SEP 15 2008

NAVIGATION AND VESSEL INSPECTION NVIC NO. 04-08

Subj: MEDICAL AND PHYSICAL EVALUATION GUIDELINES FOR MERCHANT MARINER CREDENTIALS

Ref: (a) International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978, as amended (STCW)
(b) Title 46 United States Code, Subtitle II, Part E
(c) Title 46 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Chapter I, Subchapter B
(d) Title 46 CFR Parts 401 and 402

1. **PURPOSE.** This NVIC provides guidance for evaluating the physical and medical conditions of applicants for merchant mariner's documents (MMDs), licenses, certificates of registry and STCW endorsements, collectively referred to as "credentials." This NVIC also provides guidance for evaluating the physical and medical conditions of applicants for merchant mariner credentials (MMCs), if the Coast Guard begins issuing MMCs as supplementally proposed in 72 FR 3605 (January 25, 2007). The guidance in this NVIC should assist medical practitioners, the maritime industry, individual mariners and Coast Guard personnel in evaluating a mariner's physical and medical status to meet the requirements of references (a) through (d). This guidance is not a substitute for applicable legal requirements.
 - a. Coast Guard practices with respect to the physical and medical evaluation process have considerably evolved, consistent with developments and advancements in modern medical practices, since NVIC 2-98 was published in 1998. This NVIC replaces NVIC 2-98. This NVIC puts current Coast Guard practices into writing, making them transparent for all to see and promoting their consistent application.
 - b. The guidance in this NVIC applies to applicants for original, renewal and raise in grade credentials. Enclosure (1) specifically details the standards that apply to applicants for each of the various types of credentials.

DISTRIBUTION – SDL No. 149

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z
A																										
B	*	2	2											3												1
C					3								3													
D											1	*														
E														1	2											
F																										
G																										
H																										

NON-STANDARD DISTRIBUTION: See Page 6

2. ACTION. Medical personnel who conduct examinations of applicants for credentials, and Coast Guard personnel who review applications for credentials should use the information in this NVIC to ensure a complete and appropriate physical exam is conducted.
3. DIRECTIVES AFFECTED. NVIC 2-98 and National Maritime Center (NMC) Policy Letters 11-98 and 4-99 are canceled. The Marine Safety Manual (MSM), Vol. III, Chapter 4, COMDTINST M16000.8 (series) has not been updated since 1999, and it may contain some information that conflicts with the guidance in this NVIC. Until the MSM is updated, the guidance in this NVIC supersedes the MSM in any areas where they may conflict.
4. BACKGROUND.
 - a. Reference (a) requires each country to establish standards of medical fitness for seafarers. Reference (a) applies to seagoing vessels, that is vessels which operate beyond the Boundary Line. It does not apply to inland mariners. References (b) and (c) require that mariners be physically able to perform their duties, using terms such as “general physical condition,” “good health” and “of sound health.” Reference (d) contains special requirements for registration as a Great Lakes Pilot, including the requirement to “pass a physical examination given by a licensed medical doctor.” None of these references contains specific standards, with the exception of visual acuity and color vision, for determining if mariners are physically and medically qualified.
 - b. Due to the lack of specificity in references (a) through (d), the physical and medical standards upon which credential applicants are evaluated and the medical tests and other information needed to make these evaluations may be unclear, leading to confusion and unnecessary delays. This lack of specificity may also lead to inconsistencies by medical practitioners conducting examinations of credential applicants, and ultimately by Coast Guard personnel determining whether credentials should be issued.
 - c. This NVIC details the specific medical conditions that may be subject to further review, and the recommended data for evaluation of each condition to determine fitness for service. It also details physical ability guidelines and acceptable vision and hearing standards. The specificity of this NVIC is necessary to reduce the subjectivity of the physical and medical evaluation process and promote more consistent evaluations. This NVIC will also reduce the time required to process credential applications by helping eliminate the uncertainty that mariners may currently encounter as to the specific physical and medical information needed to be submitted to process their applications.
 - d. The Coast Guard recognizes the need for qualified mariners and the potential shortage of mariners in the US and worldwide. This NVIC should not result in higher rates of disqualification for service, or in increased processing time for credential applications with physical and/or medical issues. To the contrary, the Coast Guard expects the process to be fairer and less subjective, and we anticipate application processing time to be reduced because all parties will know precisely what information is needed at the outset of the application process. The information contained in this NVIC places the historic and current practices in writing, making them transparent for all to see.

5. DISCUSSION.

- a. This NVIC is a resource to assist medical personnel in performing examinations of applicants. It provides guidance on conditions that are subject to further review for issuance of credentials and the recommended medical supplemental tests and evaluations. Medical practitioners should provide comments and recommendations with regard to the ability of applicants to meet the appropriate standards in references (a) through (d). The final determination regarding issuance of all credentials lies with the Coast Guard.
- b. Service on vessels may be arduous and impose unique physical and medical demands on mariners. The public safety risks associated with the medical and physical conditions of mariners on vessels are important considerations for the safe operation of vessels. In the event of an emergency, immediate response may be limited to the vessel's crew, and outside help may be delayed. Mariners must be medically and physically fit to perform their duties not only on a routine basis but also in an emergency.
- c. This NVIC has been developed by the Coast Guard in consultation with experienced maritime community medical practitioners and industry stakeholders. This NVIC reflects a synthesis of their recommendations, the requirements in references (a) through (d), and the recommendations of other federal transportation mode authorities as to appropriate physical and medical standards. The public was also afforded opportunity to comment on a draft of this NVIC. *See* 71 FR 56998 (September 28, 2006).
- d. Enclosure (1) provides medical certification standards as set forth in reference (c). Enclosure (1) lists the standards that apply to applicants for each of the various types of credentials.
- e. Enclosure (2) provides guidance for determining if mariners are physically able to perform their duties. For purposes of this NVIC, a medical condition is considered to cause “significant functional impairment” if it impairs the ability of the applicant to fully perform all of the physical abilities listed in this enclosure, or if it otherwise interferes with the ability of the applicant to fully perform the duties and responsibilities of the requested credential. Applicants with physical limitations who do not meet the related physical ability guidelines contained in enclosure (2) may be issued a credential with appropriate limitations as specified by the NMC.
- f. Enclosure (3) contains a non-exhaustive list of medical conditions subject to further review and supplemental medical data that should be submitted for such medical review. Not all of the medical conditions listed in enclosure (3) require a waiver. Applicants with these medical conditions may be issued credentials with or without limitations, waivers and/or other conditions of issuance as specified by the NMC. This is further discussed in enclosure (6).
 - (1) Enclosure (3)(a) contains an index of the medical conditions listed in enclosure (3).
 - (2) Enclosure (3)(b) contains a table of abbreviations used in enclosure (3).

- g. Enclosure (4) contains information about illegal substances and intoxicants, and a non-exhaustive list of medications that may be subject to further medical review in accordance with enclosure (6).
 - h. Enclosure (5) contains guidance for evaluating vision and hearing.
 - i. Enclosure (6) describes the medical review process.
 - j. Applicants for credentials should utilize form CG-719K or form CG-719K/E, as appropriate. Use of an equivalent form is acceptable if it includes the same information; however, an equivalent form should be submitted to the NMC for review prior to use. Submission of inadequate information will result in processing delays. Medical practitioners should review each page of the form. Forms and information about the medical review process are publicly available on the HOMEPORTR internet website at: <http://homeport.uscg.mil/mycg/portal/ep/browse.do?channelId=-25023>.
 - k. Some individuals may have conditions or limitations that are not listed which would render them incapable of performing their duties. Others with a listed condition or limitation may be quite capable of working at sea without posing a risk to the ship, their shipmates, or themselves. While each applicant is evaluated individually, the conditions described in this NVIC are those which may be subject to further review in accordance with enclosure (6) before a credential can be issued.
 - l. In situations where the applicant does not meet the standards specified in references (a) through (d), as supplemented by the guidance contained herein, waivers, limitations, and/or conditions of issuance may be considered by the NMC. The supplemental medical records, consultations, and test results listed in enclosure (3) should be submitted. *See* 46 CFR 10.205(d)(4) and enclosure (6).
 - m. Maritime academies should ensure that new entrants into a cadet program are physically and medically qualified. A cadet with a condition listed in enclosure (3) should be advised as early as possible that he or she may not be physically or medically eligible upon graduation to receive a credential. Medical staff at an academy may consult with the NMC. While a final determination cannot be made until an application is submitted prior to graduation, the NMC can advise that based on the cadet's present condition, a credential would probably (or probably not) be issued if he or she were applying for a credential at the present time.
 - n. Nothing in this NVIC precludes marine employers from establishing more rigorous medical or physical ability guidelines.
6. **DISCLAIMER.** This guidance is not a substitute for applicable legal requirements, nor is it itself a regulation. It is not intended to nor does it impose legally-binding requirements on any party. It represents the Coast Guard's current thinking on this topic and is issued for guidance purposes to outline methods of best practice for compliance with the applicable law. You may use an alternative approach if the approach satisfies the requirements of the

applicable statutes and regulations. If you wish to discuss alternative approaches (you are not required to do so), you may contact the NMC Medical Evaluations Branch, which is responsible for implementing this guidance. Contact information for the NMC Medical Evaluations Branch is listed in paragraph 8, below. This NVIC complies with Executive Order 13422 and associated OMB Bulletin on Agency Good Guidance Practices. See 72 FR 3432 (Jan 25, 2007).


7. **CHANGES.** This NVIC will be posted on the internet at: <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-m/nvic/index00.htm>. It will also be posted on HOMEPORT at: <http://homeport.uscg.mil/mycg/portal/ep/browse.do?channelId=-25023>

Changes will be issued as necessary. Suggestions for improvements should be submitted in writing to Commandant (CG-5434) at the address specified in the header on the first page.

8. **QUESTIONS.** All questions regarding implementation of this NVIC should be directed to the NMC Medical Evaluations Branch at the following e-mail address: marinermedical@uscg.mil. The NMC can also be telephonically contacted at: 1-888-I-ASK-NMC.

9. **ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT AND IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS.** Environmental considerations were examined in the development of this NVIC and have been determined to be not applicable.

10. **FORMS/REPORTS.** The forms called for in this Manual are available in USCG Electronic Forms on the Standard Workstation or on the Internet: <http://www.uscg.mil/forms/>, CG Central at <http://cgcentral.uscg.mil/>, and Intranet at <http://cgweb2.comdt.uscg.mil/CGFORMS/Welcome.htm>.



BRIAN M. SALERNO
Rear Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard
Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety, Security
& Stewardship

- Enclosures:
- (1) Medical Certification Standards
 - (2) Physical Ability Guidelines
 - (3) Medical Conditions Subject to Further Review
 - (3)(a) Index
 - (3)(b) Table of Abbreviations
 - (4) Medications
 - (5) Vision and Hearing Standards
 - (6) Medical Review Process